

THE ROAD OF THE RIGHTEOUS

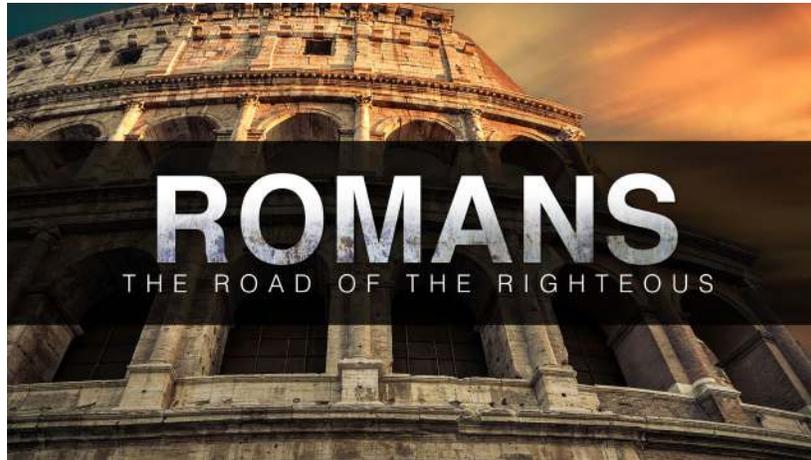
Expositional Study Of Romans

Romans 7:7-12

Written By

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November 11, 2018



Once a person buys into the misguided notion that religious works and observance of religious law(s) will ultimately lead to an eternal relationship with God, it is very difficult for them to understand and believe that salvation is by faith alone. It is also very natural for them to question and condemn anyone who downplays law and obedience to the law for by so doing they protect the law and their works-based approach to God. The fact the very first Church Council dealt with this issue illustrates the point, and as you might suspect, Paul couldn't help but be in the thick of the heated exchange. Dr. Luke gives us a vivid description of what occurred when he wrote these words:

¹ Some men came down from Judea and *began* teaching the brethren, “Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.” ² And when Paul and Barnabas had great dissension and debate with them, *the brethren* determined that Paul and Barnabas and some others of them should go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and elders concerning this issue. ³ Therefore, being sent on their way by the church, they were passing through both Phoenicia and Samaria, describing in detail the conversion of the Gentiles, and were bringing great joy to all the brethren. ⁴ When they arrived at Jerusalem, they were received by the church and the apostles and the elders, and they reported all that God had done with them. ⁵ But some of the sect of the Pharisees who had believed stood up, saying, “It is necessary to circumcise them and to direct them to observe the Law of Moses (Acts 15).”

Seems like some Jewish believers just couldn't drop the idea that Gentile believers had to obey the Mosaic Law to be saved. I'm sure it was hard to mothball this thinking since they had been reared in it, but at the conclusion of the council, the spiritual leaders definitively informed the Church at large that salvation was grounded solely upon faith in the redemptive work of Christ. Stalwart Jewish leaders like Peter and James led this noble charge to keep the wonderful, gracious gospel from being hamstrung and diminished by being equated with the Law (Acts 15:6-22).

Even though these church leaders issued a definitive theological decree to make sure the gospel was not wedded to the Law (Acts 15:23-29), we know from Paul's writings that he constantly battled with either religious non-Christian Jews or Christian Jews concerning the role of the Law in relation to salvation and a walk with God. You catch a whiff of this legalistic bent in places like Colossians 2 where Paul lays down this commandment for Christians:

¹⁶ Therefore no one is to act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day— ¹⁷ things which are a *mere* shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ (Col. 2).

Legalists always want to drag you, who are free in Christ, back into some form of bondage to the Law. Paul, of course, pushed back against this unfounded teaching throughout his pastoral career.

His letter to the Roman church is no exception.

All of his teaching about grace where the gospel is concerned made Jews nervous (Rom. 1:16-17). His teaching that Abraham was justified before God prior to the Law of Moses, made them shift in their seats (Rom. 4). His emphasis upon sinners securing an eternal standing before God by means of faith plus nothing else, caused them to swallow hard (Rom. 5:1), and ask, "How can a person be justified solely by faith? Yeah, Paul, what about the Law?" And his teaching about the introduction of the Law merely caused sin to abound just left them speechless (Rom. 5:20).

In order to take control of the combative conversation his teaching would generally generate in the church like the one in Rome composed of Jews and Gentiles, the Apostle answered questions they would surely pose in Romans 6 and 7. He had certainly heard the questions before. In verses 7 through 12, he definitively makes this strong and sure assertion:

The Law Isn't The Problem, Sin Is (Rom. 7:7-12)

To those who thought Paul taught the Law was problematic and needed to be sidelined so we could get on with grace living or lawless living, the Apostle pauses here to set them straight.

It's Purposes Show Us This Much (Rom. 7:7-11)

Before he gets into the purposes of the Law of Moses, he poses a proactive Socratic question:

⁷ What shall we say then?

He offers this question in light of what he just taught about being free to marry Christ who fulfilled the Law and set us free from its condemnation. This question is followed by a highly emphatic one, which is readily identifiable by the ellipsis of the copula, to be.

Is the Law sin?

As before (Rom. 3:4, 6, 31; 6:2, 15), he answers the theological query with a powerful negation in Greek (μὴ γένοιτο):

May it never be!

This is our version of, “That’s just not going to ever happen.” Why was Paul so forceful, verbally speaking? Because he did not want to be misunderstood so his gospel message would be diminished or tarnished, and so that people would be moved from religious error to religious truth. Paul never denigrated the Law given to Moses. Quite the contrary. How could he or why would he when it originated with the living God who is Law (Ex. 24:12)?

Opening up his personal spiritual life, Paul speaks firsthand about the divinely ordered purposes of the Law given to Moses by God. He employs the personal pronoun “I” repeatedly in this pericope (Rom. 7:7, 9) and in the next one (Rom. 7:13-25) to show what the Law does and how sin abuses and misuses the Law to its own nefarious ends. Such is the Devil’s method. He specializes in taking something holy and turning it against itself so something evil and sinister can take its place. In this instance, he takes the holy Law of God and uses the power of sin and man’s sinful predisposition to sin to dilute and pollute God’s wonderful Law. Paul combats this stratagem by speaking openly and honestly about the various purposes of the Mosaic Law . . . and these are by no means exhaustive.

Purpose 1: The Law Earmarks Sin (Rom. 7:7). Watch carefully how Paul develops this insightful and highly pragmatic point:

On the contrary, I would not have come to know sin except through the Law;

The opening strong adversative, *but* (ἀλλὰ), which is translated “On the contrary” in the NASB and “Nevertheless” in the NIV, lets us know Paul couldn’t feel more strongly that the Law of Moses is in *no way* chained to our sin. The Law is not sin, *hamartia* (ἁμαρτία), or a missing of the mark as in an archer missing a target.¹ The Law, on the contrary, identifies what constitutes sin

¹ Walter Bauer, William F. Arndt, and Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, ed. Frederick William Danker, 3rd ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), 50-51: ἁμαρτία, ἴα, ἦ (w. mngs. ranging fr. involuntary mistake/ error to serious offenses against a deity: Aeschyl., Antiphon, Democr.+; ins fr. Cyzicus JHS 27, 1907, p. 63 [III B.C.] ἁμαρτίαν μετανοεῖ; PLips 119 recto, 3; POxy 1119, 11; LXX; En, TestSol, TestAbr, TestJob, Test12Patr; JosAs 12:14; ParJer, ApcEsdr, ApcSed, ApcMos; EpArist 192; Philo; Jos., Ant. 13, 69 al.; Ar. [Milne 76, 42]; Just., A I, 61, 6; 10; 66, 1, D. 13, 1 al.; Tat. 14, 1f; 20, 1; Mel., P. 50, 359; 55, 400; s. CIR 24, 1910, 88; 234; 25, 1911, 195-97).

① **a departure fr. either human or divine standards of uprightness**

② *sin* (w. context ordinarily suggesting the level of heinousness), the action itself (ἁμαρτησις s. prec.), as well as its result (ἁμαρτημα), πᾶσα ἀδικία ἁ. ἐστίν **1J 5:17** (cp. Eur., Or. 649; Gen 50:17). ἁ. w. ἀνομήματα Hv 1, 3, 1; descr. as ἀνομία (cp. Ps 58:3; TestJob 43:17) **1J 3:4**; but one who loves is far from sin Pol 3:3, cp. **Js 5:20**; **1 Pt 4:8**, 1 Cl 49:5; Agr 13. ἀναπληρῶσαι τὰς ἁ. *fill up the measure of sins* (Gen 15:16) **1 Th 2:16**. κοινωνεῖν ἁ. ἄλλοτριαις **1 Ti 5:22**. ποιεῖν ἁ. *commit a sin* (Tob 12:10; 14:7S; Dt 9:21) **2 Cor 11:7**; **1 Pt 2:22**; **Js 5:15**; **1J 3:4, 8**. For this ἁμαρτάνειν ἁ. (Ex 32:30; La 1:8) **1J 5:16**; ἐργάζεσθαι ἁ. **Js 2:9**; Hm 4, 1, 2 (LXX oft. ἐργάζ. ἀδικίαν or ἀνομίαν). μεγάλην ἁ. ἐργάζεσθαι *commit a great sin* m 4, 1, 1; 8:2. Pl. (cp. Pla., Ep. 7, 335a τὰ μεγάλα ἁμαρτήματα κ. ἀδικήματα) Hs 7:2. ἐπιφέρειν ἁ. τινί Hv 1, 2, 4. εἰνατῶ ἁ. ἐπιφέρειν *bring sin upon oneself* m 11:4; for this ἁ. ἐπισπᾶσθαι τινί m 4, 1, 8 (cp. Is 5:18). προστιθέναι ταῖς ἁ. *add to one’s sins* (cp. προσέθηκεν ἁμαρτίας ἐφ’ ἁμαρτίας PsSol 3:10) Hv 5:7; m 4, 3, 7; Hs 6, 2, 3; 8, 11, 3; φέρειν ἁ. 1 Cl 16:4 (Is 53:4). ἀναφέρειν vs. 14 (Is 53:12). γέμειν ἁμαρτιῶν B 11:11. εἶναι ἐν ταῖς ἁμαρτίαις **1 Cor 15:17** (cp. Alex. Aphr., Eth. Probl. 9 II 2 p. 129, 13 ἐν ἁμαρτήμασιν εἶναι).—Sin viewed from the perspective of God’s or Christ’s response: ἀφιέναι τὰς ἁ. *let go = forgive sins* (Lev 4:20 al.) **Mt 9:2, 5f**; **Mk 2:5, 7, 9f**; **Lk 5:20ff**; Hv 2, 2, 4; 1 Cl 50:5; 53:5 (Ex 32:32) al. (ἀφιήμι 2); hence

sin so sinner senses they have sinned against the Holy God. In addition, it is intended to generate a sense of guilt which, in turn, can lead the sinner to conviction and confession. This is

ἄφεσις (τῶν) ἁμαρτιῶν (Iren. 1, 21, 2 [Harv. I 182, 4]) *forgiveness of sins* **Mt 26:28; Mk 1:4; Lk 1:77; 3:3; 24:47; Ac 2:38; 5:31; 10:43; 13:38;** Hm 4, 3, 2; B 5:1; 6:11; 8:3; 11:1; 16:8. διδόναι ἄφεσιν ἅ. AcPl Ha 2, 30; λαβεῖν ἄφεσιν ἅ. *receive forgiveness of sins* **Ac 26:18** (Just., D. 54 al.); καθαρίζειν τὰς ἅ. *cleanse the sins* (thought of as a stain) Hs 5, 6, 3; καθαρίζειν ἀπὸ ἅ. 1 Cl 18:3 (Ps 50:4; cp. Sir 23:10; PsSol 10:1); also καθαρισμόν ποιῆσθαι τῶν ἅ. **Hb 1:3; ἀπολούεσθαι τὰς ἅ. Ac 22:16** ([w. βαπτίζειν] Just., D. 13, 1 al.). λύτρον ἅ. *ransom for sins* B 19:10.—αἴρειν **J 1:29; περιελεῖν ἅ. Hb 10:11; ἀφαιρεῖν** (Ex 34:9; Is 27; 9) vs. 4; Hs 9, 28, 3; ῥυσθῆναι ἀπὸ ἅ. 1 Cl 60:3; ἀπὸ τῶν ἅ. ἀποσπασθῆναι AcPlCor 2:9. Sin as a burden αἰ ἅ. κατεβάρησαν Hs 9, 28, 6; as a disease ἰασθαι Hs 9, 28, 5 (cp. Dt 30:3); s. also the verbs in question.—Looked upon as an entry in a ledger; hence ἐξαλείφεται ἡ ἅ. *wiped away, cancelled* (Ps 108:14; Jer 18:23; Is 43:25) **Ac 3:19**.—Opp. στήσαι τὴν ἅ. **7:60; λογίζεσθαι ἅ. take account of sin** (as a debt; cp. the commercial metaphor **Ro 4:6** and s. FDanker, *Gingrich Festschr.* 104, n. 2) **Ro 4:8** (Ps 31:2); 1 Cl 60:2 (Just., D. 141, 3). Pass. ἅ. οὐκ ἐλλογεῖται *is not entered in the account* **Ro 5:13** (GFriedrich, TLZ 77, '52, 523–28). Of sinners ὀφειλέτης ἅ. Pol 6:1 (cp. SIG 1042, 14–16 [II A.D.] ὅς ἂν δὲ πολυπραγμονήσῃ τὰ τοῦ θεοῦ ἡ περιεργάσῃται, ἁμαρτίαν ὀφιλέτω Μηνὶ Τυράννωι, ἦν οὐ μὴ δύνῃται ἐξελάσασθαι).—γινώσκειν ἅ. (cp. Num 32:23) **Ro 7:7; Hm 4, 1, 5. ἐπίγνωσις ἁμαρτίας Ro 3:20; ὁμολογεῖν τὰς ἅ. 1J 1:9; ἐξομολογεῖσθε ἐπὶ ταῖς ἅ. B 19:12; ἐξομολογεῖσθαι τὰς ἅ. Mt 3:6; Mk 1:5; Hv 3, 1, 5f; Hs 9, 23, 4; ἐξομολογεῖσθε ἀλλήλοις τὰς ἅ. confess your sins to each other Js 5:16.**—ἐλέγχειν τινὰ περὶ ἅ. *convict someone of sin* **J 8:46;** cp. ἵνα σου τὰς ἅ. ἐλέγξω πρὸς τὸν κύριον *that I might reveal your sins before the Lord* Hv 1, 1, 5.—σεσωρευμένος ἁμαρτίας *loaded down w. sins* **2 Ti 3:6;** cp. ἐπισωρεύειν ταῖς ἅ. B 4:6; ἐνοχος τῆς ἅ. *involved in the sin* Hm 2:2; 4, 1, 5. μέτοχος τῆς ἅ. m 4, 1, 9.—In Hb sin is atoned for (ἱλάσκεσθαι τὰς ἅ. **2:17**) by sacrifices θυσιαὶ ὑπὲρ ἅ. **5:1** (cp. 1 Cl 41:2). προσφορά περὶ ἅ. *sin-offering* **10:18;** also simply περὶ ἅ. (Lev 5:11; 7:37) vss. **6, 8** (both Ps 39:7; cp. **1 Pt 3:18**); προσφέρειν περὶ ἅ. *bring a sin-offering* **Hb 5:3;** cp. **10:12; 13:11**. Christ has made the perfect sacrifice for sin **9:23ff;** συνειδήσις ἅ. *consciousness of sin* **10:2;** ἀνάμνησις ἅ. *a reminder of sins* of the feast of atonement vs. **3**.

ⓑ special sins (ἅ. τῆς ἀποστασίας Iren. 5, 26, 2 [Harv. II 397, 4]); πρὸς θάνατον *that leads to death* **1J 5:16b** (ἁμαρτάνω ε); opp. οὐ πρὸς θάνατον vs. **17. μεγάλη ἅ. a great sin** Hv 1, 1, 8 al. (Gen 20:9; Ex 32:30 al.; cp. Schol. on Pla., Tht. 189d ἁμαρτήματα μεγάλα). μείζων ἅ. m 11:4; ἡττων 1 Cl 47:4. μεγάλη κ. ἀνιάτος Hm 5, 2, 4; τέλειαι ἅ. Hv 1, 2, 1; B 8:1, cp. τὸ τέλειον τῶν ἅ. 5:11 (Philo, Mos. 1, 96 κατὰ τῶν τέλεια ἡμαρτηκότων); ἡ προτέρα ἅ. (Arrian, Anab. 7, 23, 8 εἴ τι πρότερον ἡμαρτηκας) sin committed before baptism Hm 4, 1, 11; 4, 3, 3; Hs 8, 11, 3; cp. v 2, 1, 2.

② a state of being sinful, *sinfulness*, a prominent feature in Johannine thought, and opposed to ἀλήθεια; hence ἅ. ἔχειν **J 9:41; 15:24; 1J 1:8. μείζονα ἅ. ἔχειν J 19:11; ἅ. μένει 9:41. γεννᾶσθαι ἐν ἁμαρτίαις be born in sin 9:34** (ἐν ἁμαρτία v.1.); opp. ἐν ἅ. ἀποθανεῖν *die in sin* **8:21, 24; AcPl Ha 1, 16. ἅ. ἐν αὐτῷ οὐκ ἔστιν 1J 3:5.**

③ a destructive evil power, *sin*

ⓐ Paul thinks of sin almost in pers. terms (cp. Sir 27:10; Mel., P. 50, 359; PGM 4, 1448 w. other divinities of the nether world, also Ἁμαρτία χθόνια; Dibelius, *Geisterwelt* 119ff) as a ruling power that invades the world. Sin came into the world **Ro 5:12** (JFreundorfer, *Erbsünde u. Erbtod* b. Ap. Pls 1927; ELohmeyer, ZNW 29, 1930, 1–59; JSchnitzer, *D. Erbsünde im Lichte d. Religionsgesch.* '31; ROtto, *Sünde u. Urschuld* '32; FDanker, **Ro 5:12**: Sin under Law: NTS 14, '67/68, 424–39), reigns there vs. **21; 6:14**; everything was subject to it **Gal 3:22**; people serve it **Ro 6:6**; are its slaves vss. **17, 20**; are sold into its service **7:14** or set free from it **6:22**; it has its law **7:23; 8:2**; it revives (ἀνέζησεν) **Ro 7:9** or is dead vs. **8**; it pays its wages, viz., death **6:23**, cp. **5:12** (see lit. s.v. ἐπὶ 6c). As a pers. principle it dwells in humans **Ro 7:17, 20**, viz., in the flesh (s. σάρξ 2ca) **8:3**; cp. vs. **2; 7:25**. The earthly body is hence a σῶμα τῆς ἅ. **6:6 (Col 2:11 v.1).**—As abstr. for concr. τὸν μὴ γνόντα ἅ. ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν ἁμαρτίαν ἐποίησεν (God) *made him, who never sinned, to be sin* (i.e. the guilty one) *for our sakes* **2 Cor 5:21.**

ⓑ In Hb (as in OT) sin appears as the power that deceives humanity and leads it to destruction, whose influence and activity can be ended only by sacrifices (s. 1a end): ἀπάτη τῆς ἅ. **Hb 3:13.**—On the whole word s. ἁμαρτάνω, end. GMoore, *Judaism* I 445–52; ABüchler, *Studies in Sin and Atonement in the Rabb. Lit. of the I Cent.* 1928; WKnuth, *D. Begriff der Sünde* b. Philon v. Alex., diss. Jena '34; EThomas, *The Problem of Sin in the NT* 1927; Dodd 76–81; DDaube, *Sin, Ignorance and Forgiveness in the Bible*, '61; AGelin and ADescamps, *Sin in the Bible*, '65.—On the special question 'The Christian and Sin' see PWernle 1897; HWindisch 1908; EHedström 1911; RBultmann, ZNW 23, 1924, 123–40; Windisch, *ibid.* 265–81; RSchulz, *D. Frage nach der Selbsttätigkt. d. Menschen im sittl. Leben* b. Pls., diss. Hdlb. '40.—JAddison, ATR 33, '51, 137–48; KKuhn, *πειρασμός ἁμαρτία σάρξ* im NT: ZTK 49, '52, 200–222; JBremer, *Hamartia* '69 (Gk. views).—B. 1182. EDNT. DELG s.v. ἁμαρτάνω. M-M. TW.

what the Law does so well, but its inherent weakness is it cannot *save*, it can only *scar* the sinner by means of identifying sinful activity.

To validate this purpose of the Law Paul taps into the tenth commandment from Exodus 20, verse 17, which is known for its internal nature.

for I would not have known about coveting if the Law had not said, “YOU SHALL NOT COVET.”

He employs the Greek word here for experiential knowledge, *ginosko* (γινώσκω).² His point is clear: How could a sinner know what coveting is unless God’s law told him so? How could you possibly know it is *not* OK to drive on Interstate 95 like Germans do on the glorious *Autobahn* . . . where a suggested or recommended speed is 80 mph . . . unless posted signs said likewise? Yes, the sign does not say “Choose whatever speed is comfortable to you.” Once the sign is posted you know what constitutes sinful driving, correct? How could you know that you cannot phonetically spell words anyway you like when you play *Scrabble* unless the rule book informed you of what type of spelling is accepted? How could a referee know what constitutes a late hit on a Redskin quarterback unless there is rule defining what late his actually is? You couldn’t even play a game of tennis if someone didn’t know it is not all right to hit the ball twice in your side of the net each time you attempt to return the ball. The law is great insofar as it tells us what is sinful and what is not.

True, God gave mankind natural moral law when He created the cosmos, and this type of law governed the world as mankind headed chronologically toward the revelation of the Law to Moses. So, there was/is a sense in which man knows intrinsically his activity of taking his neighbor’s camel is not appropriate, it is not until the disclosure of the Law that man knows his action is a sinful infraction and it is not only against his neighbor, but against God’s himself who has said man should not covet, ever.

The Law of God is good, then, because it tells man what God expects from him. How could that purpose ever be classified as sinful? It couldn’t be because it originates in God himself. The problem, however, is sin which dwells in man’s heart.

A second purpose is equally important and instructive:

Purpose 2: The Law Entices Sin (Rom. 7:8). Sin, by nature, perverts and twists that which is holy and righteous. Sin is a contaminate, a corrosive, something akin to sulfuric or hydrochloric acid. It destroys that which it touches. Paul’s next statement puts this all in perspective:

⁸ But sin, taking opportunity through the commandment, produced in me coveting of every kind; for apart from the Law sin is dead.

This statement tells us that sinful man desires, even pursues and takes delight in, sinful activity. Put differently, sinners encounter a law and immediately look for ways to defy and flaunt it. Paul’s life, again, tells us this much. He readily admits that as he grew up and became more morally aware

²Friberg, *Analytical Greek Lexicon*, γινώσκω impf. ἐγίνωσκον; fut. mid. γνώσομαι; 2aor. ἔγνω; pf. ἔγνωκα; pf. pass. ἔγνωσμαι; laor. pass. ἐγνώσθη; lfut. pass. γνώσθήσομαι; (1) of intelligent comprehension know, come to understand, ascertain (LU 8.10); (2) with a person as the object know, be acquainted with (2C 5.16); (3) as learning something through sense perception learn of, become aware of, find out, perceive (MK 5.29); (4) euphemistically have sexual intercourse (MT 1.25); (5) of recognition of a claim acknowledge, recognize (MT 7.23); (6) of certainty gained through experience know, come to know, be sure of; (a) of a thing (JN 8.32); (b) of a person (JN 2.24; IJ 2.3).

of God's laws, especially concerning coveting, it didn't cause him to covet less but more . . . way more. Once he became aware he should not covet from a divine prerogative, the fascination with disobeying the command simply exploded.

In order to develop this point Paul uses a Greek word wedded to the military concept of establishing a beachhead. The word in question is "opportunity," or *aphormen* (ἀφορμὴν). It can also denote, according to *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, ed. Frederick William Danker,³ "the starting-point or base of operations for an expedition." Ostensibly, this means that when God gave the holy command not to covet, sin, as a power, and directed by the Devil, of course, seized the moment to pervert and twist the imperative of God. Interesting as well as shocking. Sin cleverly took something holy and turned it into something unholy by seizing the moment to push evil. More precisely, God's commandment not to covet cause sin to seize the moment and motivate man to want to really covet and, therefore, defy the living God and His life-giving mandates. Has anything changed? No way. People are, based on inherited Adamic sin (Rom. 5:12-21), captivated by twisting, perverting, and defying law, especially God's law.

Every winter, our youth group would head to winter camp near a beautiful lake in the mountains east outside of San Diego. Every year the youth leaders specially warned us not to get in the small row boat and head out onto the deep lake. Since an earthen dam formed the lake, there was literally no shallow end, so the command was understandable.

One trouble-maker set of male twins just couldn't resist the row boat one night. He loaded his girlfriend into the wooden vessel, and headed slowly out onto the moonlight surface of the glistening body of water. At the same time, we law abiders enjoyed our free-time hiking on the boulder mountains looking down at the lake. I'll never forget their blood-curdling screams, "Help us! Help us! Somebody, please, help us! The boat has a hole in it and it is sinking." They were eventually rescued, but they should have listened to and obeyed the imperatival words of the wise youth leaders. But they didn't. Why? The boat rule merely aroused their sinful desire to want to get those splintery oars in their hands. Such is the nature of the power of resident sin. The law merely said what man was not supposed to do. It was not the problem. What was, and is, the problem is the sinfulness of man's being.

Think back to Israel's rollercoaster spiritual history. They did not rebel against the living God by making an idol to worship until first told them not to do it (Ex. 20:4; 32). Was God's commandment and law against false, alternate worship sinful? No. It was holy and just. Once, however, it was articulated, it stimulated Israel's innate sinful desire to construct a lifeless golden calf in place of God. This theological reality flew in the face of rabbinical teaching which taught that the law helped to hold evil desires and impulses in check: "Michel, 227, describes the rabbinic teaching that the "good urge" makes use of the law to oppose the impulses of the 'evil urge.'"⁴ Paul not only rebutted this misguided notion and teaching, he demonstrated that quite the opposite was, and is, true. The law identifies what is sinful, and this communication, while holy, acts like a trip wire to cause man's sinful nature to explode to whole new levels of disobedience. Every Jew, therefore, reading Paul's letter to the Romans about justification by faith should have understood this theological reality and known that Paul was not anti-law, but pro-law. The nature of the Law entices sin, it is not sin.

³Ibid., 159

⁴ Robert Jewett and Roy David Kotansky, *Romans: A Commentary*, ed. Eldon Jay Epp, Hermeneia—a Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2006), 449.

We, as sinful creatures, must stop and ask the obvious question. Why does disobedience of the Law of God, or any law for that matter, allure us so?

Barclay's words are spot on in his concise commentary on Romans:

(1) We are deluded regarding the *satisfaction* to be found in sin. No one ever took a forbidden thing without thinking that it would bring happiness, and no one ever found that it did. (2) We are deluded regarding the *excuse* that can be made for it. Everyone thinks that doing the wrong thing can be defended; but no one's defense ever sounded anything but futile when it was made in the presence of God. (3) We are deluded regarding the *probability of escaping the consequences of it*. We never commit a sin without the hope that we can get away with it. But it is true that, sooner or later, our sin will find us out.⁵

And don't just think these words apply to rebellious prone teens, either. All sinners are rebellious by nature and they live to flaunt God's Laws, and to then concoct twisted rationalizations for why they do what they do. Some will even go so far as to blame the Law itself. Remember, the Law is not the problem. Sin is the problem, and sin will cost you, every time. Just learn from a former friend of mine, Paul Milner. He stared out with marijuana in Junior High and by our ninth grade year in High School he was dead from a heroin overdose. He lived on the edge of life, he lived to mock God's laws, and one day he went over the edge.

The third and final purpose of Mosaic Law is detailed in verses nine through eleven.

Purpose 3: The Law Energizes Life (Rom. 7:9-11). Paul's words here are most personal as he looks back over his life as a non-Christian.

⁹ I was once alive apart from the Law; but when the commandment came, sin became alive and I died; ¹⁰ and this commandment, which was to result in life, proved to result in death for me;

He is probably alluding to the time before his Bar Mitzvah, when he formally became a "son of the commandment" at age thirteen. Life apart from Law, then, merely represents Paul's life as a somewhat clueless young child and boy. Physically, he was alive and spiritually he learned later, as he says in Romans 5:12-21, he was, in fact spiritually dead. But from his perspective his life progressed fairly well, morally and spiritually speaking, until he became well-acquainted with the dictates and demands of the Torah in his early teenage years. Once he had this awareness, once he knew this Law, once He knew clearly what God had commanded, it was as if he really died in the sense that he realized there was no way on earth he would ever fulfill all of this Law. He also died insofar as he realized his sinful tendencies were set ablaze by the sin in his heart.

The problem, again, was not with the Law, it was with Paul's sinful heart. The Law was, as Paul states, divinely designed to give man true spiritual life. Many texts support this premise.

⁵You shall therefore keep my statutes and my rules; if a person does them, he shall live by them: I am the LORD (Lev. 18).

⁵ William Barclay, *The Letter to the Romans*, 3rd ed. fully rev. & updated., The New Daily Study Bible (Louisville, KY; London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 113-114.

¹² Now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require from you, but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all His ways and love Him, and to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul,¹³ *and* to keep the LORD'S commandments and His statutes which I am commanding you today for your good? (Deut. 10).

³³ You shall walk in all the way which the LORD your God has commanded you, that you may live, and that it may be well with you, and that you may prolong your days in the land which you shall possess (Deut. 5).

Psalm 119 contains a plethora of verses which extol the greatness of the Law of God. As the Psalmist closes his praise of God's Law, he offers this sagacious advice:

¹⁶⁵ Those who love Thy law have great peace, and nothing causes them to stumble. ¹⁶⁶ I hope for Thy salvation, O LORD, And do Thy commandments. ¹⁶⁷ My soul keeps Thy testimonies, and I love them exceedingly. ¹⁶⁸ I keep Thy precepts and Thy testimonies, for all my ways are before Thee. (Ps. 119).

The Law did promise life for those who kept it. Jesus even said this much in His interaction with a wealthy ruler over Israel:

¹⁸ And a certain ruler questioned Him, saying, "Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" ¹⁹ And Jesus said to him, "Why do you call Me good? No one is good except God alone. ²⁰ "You know the commandments, 'Do not commit adultery, Do not murder, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Honor your father and mother.'" ²¹ And he said, "All these things I have kept from *my* youth." ²² And when Jesus heard *this*, He said to him, "One thing you still lack; sell all that you possess, and distribute it to the poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me." ²³ But when he had heard these things, he became very sad, for he was extremely rich. ²⁴ And Jesus looked at him and said, "How hard it is for those who are wealthy to enter the kingdom of God (Luke 18)!"

Obedience to the commands of the holy Law of Moses had the potential to lead to life, but because of man's inherited sin nature it precluded him from ever fulfilling this divine requirement. The whole situation pointed to the need for the God-man to come and completely do what no man could do: fulfill the entire law externally and internally. That man, of course, was/is Jesus, the Christ. Jesus told us this much:

¹⁷ Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish, but to fulfill. ¹⁸ For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass away from the Law, until all is accomplished (Matt. 5).

He, of course, fulfilled the Law to the letter so He could become man's Savior. Paul speaks later in Romans about the demand of the law for mankind:

⁴ For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes. ⁵ For Moses writes that the man who practices the righteousness which is based on law shall live by that righteousness (Rom. 10).

Translated into our vernacular: *If you desire to become righteous and holy by means of the Law of Moses, you must practice all of it continually.* And, as Paul has shown in Romans 7, verses 7 through 8, it is impossible for man to do this because coveting, an internal sin, will get him every time. What was needed was a man who could fulfill all of the Law, including internal obedience to a command like that regarding coveting. Once, more, that man could only be the God-man, Jesus. And, once more, the problem was not with the Law of God. It did promise to energize the life of a sinner; however, the problem was the sinner's sinful disposition would eventually undercut this pursuit, resulting in what Paul calls the realization that he was, in fact, spiritually dead (Rom. 5:12-21).

The nasty nature of indwelling sin then went for broke in the life of a young Law-lover like Paul. His next words are as candid as they are sad:

¹¹ for sin, taking an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me.

What did sin do? It, to use the word Paul had used before, established another beachhead to launch another battle against God and God's truth. It took the holiness of the commandments and deceived Paul into thinking that perpetual obedience to the Law would lead to perpetual acceptance before a holy and living God. Is this not dastardly?

Satan is so crafty and sin is so powerful. Such are the ways of our Adversary. He'll take something like tolerance and subvert it by leading us to believe that every belief should be tolerated, even if it defies truth. He'll take the biblical premise that racism is wrong and quietly wed sexual perversion to it so that it becomes sinful to speak against sexual perversion because it is now classified as racism. He'll take the command to study the Word of God and get you so wrapped up and committed to it that you'll be led to believe biblical study and knowledge is the essence of spirituality, which it is not. The list of truth twisting and principle perversion goes on and on.

Paul's encounter with the risen Christ shattered his false illusion about spirituality wedded to belief in God coupled with zealous commitment to the Law. In the brightness of the shekinah glory of God, God lovingly replaced deception with reception . . . the reception of the truth about the Savior and His glorious gospel. At that marvelous moment Paul immediately understood the futility of his understanding of the Law of God and his utter need for a faith relationship with the only perfect One who could be truly energized by the Law. His name was Jesus.

As I've said, I'll say again: The problem was not with the Law of God, but sin resident in man. The claim against Paul, therefore, was completely unfounded. Paul loved the Law and embraced its high theological value. But he also recognized through these three purposes how that Law pointed to the One who needed to come to fulfill all aspects of the Law so lawless unbelievers could, in fact, eventually be justified by faith in the Messiah.

Just in case anyone reading his letter still thought he downplayed or diminished the Law with his teaching about grace and the gospel, Paul definitively states why the Law isn't the problem, but man's sin is:

It's Perfection Shows Us This Much (Rom. 7:12)

Listen and learn from his words:

¹² So then, the Law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good.

How could the Law not be holy? How could the commandments not be holy, righteous and good? They are all of these things because the Law is God's Law . . . it originates in Him. How could we know, as C.S. Lewis once quipped, a line is crooked if we did not know an absolutely straight line? How could we know the Ten Commandments unless there was and is a God to measure them against, a God who is absolutely holy, righteous, and good? Hence, to diminish or tarnish the Law in any fashion was/is an open affront to the God who gave the Law, telling man specifically what constitutes sin and what is expected of him. The Old Testament could not be clearer about this point. Speaking to the Israelites about the enter the Promised Land, Moses reminded them of the glorious Law God had graciously given them. You will notice how Pauline his words sound, although uttered 1,400 years prior to Paul:

⁵ See, I have taught you statutes and rules, as the LORD my God commanded me, that you should do them in the land that you are entering to take possession of it.

⁶ Keep them and do them, for that will be your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples, who, when they hear all these statutes, will say, 'Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.' ⁷ For what great nation is there that has a god so near to it as the LORD our God is to us, whenever we call upon him (Deut. 4)?

The Law couldn't have been more holy because it was/is intimately connected with God who epitomizes holiness (Psa. 22:3; 71:22; 77:13). Paul, therefore, would never have said anything against the Law because of he understood how it originated. He, on the other hand, readily and pragmatically realized how its purposes quickly demonstrated that man has an ingrained sin problem and needs a perfect, law-abiding Savior. Once he woke up from the illusion he could save himself through obedience to the Law, once he saw the sin in his own soul, then, and only, then, did Paul fall at the feet of the only One who could save him.

A story from *Science Daily* is most instructive as we consider the wonder of the Law, the sinfulness of man, and the coming judgment of God.

In East Tennessee there's a bird known as the Golden Winged Warbler. These birds started doing something unusual after giving birth to their chicks—they started fleeing their nests. The discovery was made by accident while researchers were testing whether the warblers, which weigh "less than two nickels," could carry geolocators on their backs. It turns out they can, and much more. With a big storm brewing, the birds took off from their breeding ground in the Cumberland Mountains of eastern Tennessee, where they had only just arrived, for an unplanned migratory event. All told, the warblers travelled 900 miles in five days to avoid the tornado-producing storms. Golden-winged warblers apparently knew in advance that a storm was coming, according to a report in the Cell Press journal *Current Biology* on December 18. The birds left the scene well before devastating supercell storms blew in. Scientists believe that there's some kind of infrasound frequency that alerts them that the storms are coming. They had

something that we don't have many times—a warning. One of the researchers commented that the birds' "behavior presumably costs the birds some serious energy and time they should be spending on reproducing."⁶

Right now you are that little bird, spiritually speaking. You've just picked up the signal that a divine storm is coming against all those who are deceived into thinking obedience to the Law will bring eternal life. It won't, as Paul has demonstrated. What do you need to do? Fly not to Tennessee but to the cross of the One who fulfilled all aspects of the Law and then died for your sin and rose as the Victor over sin and death. His name you know well. It's Jesus, and I think right now is a good time for you to move from knowing about Him to knowing Him by faith. Life awaits your courageous, logical decision.

⁶ "Birds Sensed Severe Storms and Fled Before Tornado Outbreak," *Science News* (12-18-14).